

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 260535Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3371

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3683

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SI, CH

SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER
AND HARVARD EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER

REF: SINGAPORE 3676

1. FORWARDED HERewith ARE TEXTS OF THE LETTERS EXCHANGED BETWEEN PROFESSORS PERKINS, COHEN, AND VOGEL OF THE HARVARD EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER AND PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW RELATIVE TO A PROPOSED PROGRAM TO STUDY OVERSEAS CHINESE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

2. AS NOTED IN REFTel, WHEN PRIME MINISTER LEE MADE THIS CORRESPONDENCE AVAILABLE TO ME HE INVITED MY COMMENTS REGARDING HIS REPLY TO PROFESSOR PERKINS. I AM SENDING THE TEXTS TELEGRAPHICALLY IN ORDER TO PROVIDE TIME FOR INTERESTED AREAS OF THE DEPARTMENT TO SEND ME THEIR THOUGHTS FOR POSSIBLE INCORPORATION IN MY RESPONSE. I HOPE TO FORWARD THIS RESPONSE NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 3:

FOLLOWING LETTER NO. 1, DATED JUNE 5, 1975 FROM EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER, HARVARD:

QUOTE:

JUNE 5, 1975

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HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
ISTANA ANNEX
SINGAPORE 9
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

DEAR MR. PRIME MINISTER:

OUR MUCH- APPRECIATED SESSION WITH YOU ON MAY 14 HAS LED US TO
THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

1. WE SHOULD LOSE NO TIME IN TRYING TO DEVELOP AT HARVARD
AS AN INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE A GREATER COMPETENCE TO STUDY SOUTH-
EAST ASIA AND PARTICULARLY THE ROLE OF THE ETHNIC CHINESE IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHINA AND THE BROADER
EAST ASIAN SCENE.

2. THE FIRST STEP MUST BE TO SEARCH OUT AND TRAIN TALENT FOR
THIS PURPOSE. OUR PRESENT FACULTY RESOURCES ARE STRONG IN THE
FIELD OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN GENERAL, BUT NEED
TO BE STRENGTHENED AND REORIENTED TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH
CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA AND WITH THE ETHNIC CHI-
NESE IN THAT REGION. AN ABSOLUTE INCREASE IN SKILLED PERSONNEL,
THEREFORE, MUST BE THE FIRST PRIORITY, WITHOUT WHICH NOTHING
CAN REALLY BE ACHIEVED.

3. TO LOCATE AND DEVELOP TALENT IN THE REQUISITE SOCIAL SCIENCE
AND HUMANISTIC DISCIPLINES AND IN THE REQUISITE LANGUAGES,
WE BELIEVE THE STARTING POINT SHOULD BE A FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM
THAT WOULD SEND ABLE TRAINEES FROM HARVARD TO SINGAPORE AND
WOULD BRING MORE ESTABLISHED SCHOLARS AND OTHER RELEVANT PER-
SONNEL FROM SINGAPORE AND ELSEWHERE TO HARVARD.

4. ONLY AFTER A CORPUS OF TRAINED PERSONNEL HAS BEGUN TO EMERGE
CAN WE REALLY MOUNT THE KIND OF PROGRAMMATIC STUDIES THAT ARE
NEEDED. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO FIX SUCH PROGRAMS AT THIS
POINT. INSTEAD, RESEARCH PROGRAMS SHOULD REPRESENT A
SECOND PHASE OF OUR EFFORT.

5. THE IMMEDIATE ESSENTIALS FOR FORWARD MOVEMENT IN THIS IMPOR-
TANT AREA ARE A) A JOINT COMMITTEE OF INTERESTED PERSONS IN
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SINGAPORE AND HARVARD AND B) FUNDS ON THE ORDER OF A MILLION
DOLLARS FOR ENDOWMENT IN ORDER TO ESTABLISHED BASIC SUPPORT
OF PERSONNEL AND FUTURE PROJECTS.

6. THE ANNUAL RETURN FROM THE ENDOWMENT FUND WOULD BE USED
FIRST FOR TRAINING AND NECESSARY MOVEMENT OF PERSONNEL, SECONDLY
FOR CONFERENCES TO BRING TOGETHER QUALIFIED PERSONS AND THIRD
FOR THE PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECTS, EVEN THOUGH

SUCH PROJECTS MIGHT AT THAT TIME REQUIRE FURTHER FINANCING.

IF THE ABOVE COULD HAVE YOUR ACCEPTANCE IN PRINCIPLE AS A SOUND WAY TO PROCEED, WE WOULD THEN BE PREPARED TO WORK THROUH OUR HARVARD AND EAST ASIA FUND RAISING PROGRAM AND WOULD SPECIFICALLY HOPE TO APPROACH FUNDING SOURCES IN SINGAPORE. THIS SUGGESTION IS MADE IN THE BELIEF THAT OUR OTHER AND PREVIOUS EFFORTS TO BUILD UP EAST ASIAN RESEARCH COMPETENCE AT HARVARD CAN BE HELP TO CONSTITUTE A CONTRIBUTION FROM OUR SIDE IN A BILATERAL SITUATION OF MUTUAL INTEREST AND VALUE.

SINCERELY,

DWIGHT H. PERKINS, COORDINATOR

JEROME A. COHEN

EZRA F. VOGEL UNQUOTE
HOLDRIDGE

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 260535Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3372

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 3683

EXDIS

FOLLOWING LETTER NO. 2, DATED JULY 15, 1975 FROM PRIME MINISTER
LEE KUAN YEW:

QUOTE:

15 JULY 1975

PROF DWIGHT H PERKINS
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
ROOM 301, 1737 CAMBRIDGE STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138
U S A

DEAR PROFESSOR PERKINS

THANK YOU FOR YOUR LETTER OF 5 JUNE, ALSO SIGNED BY JEROME
COHEN AND EZRA VOGEL.

TO SUCCEED, THIS PROJECT CANNOT START WITH A STUDY OF THE
ETHNIC CHINESE IN SINGAPORE. IT WILL BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.
PREFERABLY, THE EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER COULD, AFTER BUILDING
UP CONTACTS WITH THE UNIVERSITIES AND/OR RESEARCH INSTITUTES
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, GET THE BLESSINGS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE
GOVERNMENTS FOR THIS PROJECT.

I AM READY TO HELP SET UP A JOINT COMMITTEE, ON CONDITION
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THAT THE PROJECT STARTS, MORE OR LESS SIMULTANEOUSLY, IN AT
LEAST THREE OTHER SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES, ONE, THAILAND,
PREDOMINANTLY BUDDHIST, ANOTHER, MALAYSIA, PREDOMINANTLY MALAY
MUSLIM, AND INDONESIA, PREDOMINANTLY JAVANESE "KEBATINAN"
(I.E. NOMINAL MUSLIM OVERLAY OF HINDU AND EARLIER MYSTIC
BELIEFS). THIS COMMITTEE OF INTERESTED PERSONS CAN SET OUT TO
RAISE A MILLION DOLLARS FOR BASIC SUPPORT OF PERSONNEL AND
FUTURE PROJECTS.

HOWEVER, TO HAVE A FAIR CHANCE OF ACHIEVING THIS FIGURE,
THE CENTER MUST GET THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT TO AGREE, LIKE THE
SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT, TO TREAT YOUR PROJECT AS A CHARITY
FOR PURPOSES OF INCOME TAX. THEN THE RAISING OF FUNDS WILL BE
GREATLY FACILITATED. DONATIONS WILL PROBABLY COME MAINLY FROM
ETHNIC CHINESE IN SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA WHO HAVE CONSIDERABLE
INVESTMENTS IN BOTH COUNTRIES. YOU MAY THINK IT WISE TO MAKE
SIMILAR APPLICATIONS TO THE THAI, INDONESIAN AND FILIPINO
GOVERNMENTS.

ONCE THE COMMITTEE IS SET UP, I CANNOT CONTINUE TO TAKE ANY
ACTIVE ROLE IN THE PROJECT. IT IS NOT ONLY TIME CONSUMING,
WORSE, IT CAN ALSO BECOME POLITICALLY COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.

THE PROJECT CAN GET OFF TH A QUICKER START BY PICKING UP
WHERE OTHER AMERICAN SCHOLARS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA HAVE LEFT OFF.
THESE SCHOLARS, SPONSORED BY VARIOUS SOUTHEAST ASIAN INSTITUTES,
ESPECIALLY THOSE OF YALE AND CORNELL, HAVE STUDIED THE VARIOUS
CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. FOR EXAMPLE, PROFESSOR
ROBERT TILMAN, FORMERLY OF THE INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN

STUDIES IN YALE, AND NOW DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, HAS STUDIED, AND IS STILL STUDYING, THE ETHNIC CHINESE IN THE PHILIPPINES, AND INCIDENTALLY IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE. HE IS GOING OUT TO THE PHILIPPINES AGAIN THIS OCTOBER, AND WILL BE SPENDING SOME TIME TO COVER THE REGION, INCLUDING MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE.

THE CONTRIBUTION BY PROFESSOR MILTON JACOB ESMAN IN A BOOK ENTITLED "ETHNICITY" EDITED BY NATHAN GLAZER AND PATRICK MOYNIHAN (HARVARD U PRESS ISBN 0-674-26855-5), WILL GIVE YOU A GLIMPSE OF HOW HE TREATED THIS SUBJECT. THE CONCLUSIONS WERE DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR BEFORE SOUTHEAST ASIA OPENED UP DIPLOMATIC
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RELATIONS WITH THE PRC, AND DURING A PERIOD WHEN US DOMINANCE WAS COMPLETE.

THESE SCHOLARS STARTED FROM A SOUTHEAST ASIAN STANDPOINT. THEY STUDIES THE ETHNIC CHINESE WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE POLICIES OF THE PRC, AND IN A PERIOD WHEN THE PRC WAS ISOLATED FROM THE WHOLE REGION. IT WILL BE SLOW AND TEDIOUS TO BUILD UP A NEW CORPUS OF SCHOLARS FROM SCRATCH. I HAVE REASONS TO BELIEVE THAT THESE INSTITUTES OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES IN YALE AND CORNELL FACE A SHORTAGE OF FUNDS TO CONTINUE THEIR WORK IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, ESPECIALLY POST-VIETNAM. BY DRAWING IN THESE MEN, THE EAST ASIAN RESEARCH CENTER CAN, WITH ITS SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE OF PRC POLICIES, REDIRECT THEIR STUDIES INTO AREAS WHICH WILL BECOME MORE RELEVANT TO THE FUTURE.

WE ARE WITNESSING AN INCREASINGLY ACTIVE PERIOD, THE RESULT OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN VARIOUS GOVERNMENTS IN THE REGION AND THE PRC. ALREADY, THREE GOVERNMENTS, MALAYSIA, PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND, HAVE AGREED AND ARE OPENING UP DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS WITH THE PRC.

WITH BEST WISHES,
YOURS SINCERELY,
LEE KUAN YEW. UNQUOTE. HOLDRIDGE

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